



Press Info:

Eugen Cicero
„Swinging Piano Classics“
Eugen Cicero's last recording

IOR CD 77047-2

Release Date

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This outstanding, newly-discovered recording by the late Eugen Cicero, which features his highly distinctive jazz interpretations of classical pieces by Scarlatti, Chopin, Mozart and Bach plus some well-loved popular song standards, will be enthusiastically welcomed by his many fans around the world. Recorded in concert at the Kursaal in Überlingen am Bodensee in December 1996, this album is the last to be recorded by Cicero and represents an enduring tribute to his keyboard virtuosity.

Of Romanian-Hungarian descent, Eugen Cicero was born in Cluj-Napoca, Romania, on June 26, 1940. His remarkable musical aptitude manifested itself at a very early age. He started taking piano lessons at the age of four and was taught by some of the country's most renowned teachers. He owed his brilliantly sensitive touch to the instruction he received from Aurelia Cionca, while Ana Pitis initiated him into the virtuoso tradition, as personified by Franz Liszt.

In addition, Cicero studied instrumentation and composition at the National Conservatory in Bucharest. However, neither the prospect of an academic career nor that of becoming a conventional concert pianist appealed to him. He saw these roles as much too restrictive. The key musical philosophy for Cicero was to be receptive towards everything new and to maintain a free spirit in developing his art.

Growing up in a communist country, he found swing music to be a magical source of inspiration. It was therefore almost inevitable that his first concert tour in the sixties took him West – to Berlin to be exact – the melting pot of European jazz. There, Cicero encountered musicians with a multitude of different styles,

and, thanks to his well-honed powers of perception, he was able to adapt some of these to his own musical approach. Soon his personal style crystallized into the so-called Classic-Swing idiom, forging a harmonious link between classical music and mainstream jazz.

The response to Cicero's distinctive keyboard work was an immediate, widespread and enthusiastic one. His recipe for success was to introduce into exquisite baroque, classical and romantic compositions an infectious swing and sophisticated harmonies, and his gifted and dextrous hands transformed these works into timeless masterpieces.

Many musicians had already sought to combine the classical and jazz idioms, but none of them could match Cicero's ability to draw on a rich fund of knowledge and extraordinary technical expertise to achieve such an inspired synthesis. Cicero was, without question, the leading exponent of the so-called Classic-Swing style.

Atrue evaluation of Cicero's creativity requires not only an appreciation of his tremendous technique but also an ability to listen with the heart. Cicero loved music and he loved his audience. He never played for himself, but for his audiences, which he always succeeded in captivating. His careful selection of originals, prior to each performance, was a pure delight not only for the friends of classical music but also for jazz lovers.

Above all, however, it was the spontaneity and improvisational flair with which he presented his interpretations that transformed each of his concerts into a work of musical art –

something which is rarely to be experienced in the concert hall today.

In 1976 Eugen Cicero was awarded a German Schallplatten Preis for his arrangements of compositions by Franz Schubert. In addition to more than 70 recordings and numerous domestic and foreign TV appearances, he made pioneering recordings with the Berlin and Munich Philharmonic orchestras. He also toured Japan, a country where he achieved cult status thanks to his thousands of dedicated and loyal fans.

It was not easy for critics to categorise Eugen Cicero's playing. The designation "golden hands", which was attributed to him throughout his career, was an indication that both music lovers and critics valued his consistently high level of performance, especially at times of radical change in the music scene. Even now, after more than 40 years, the name of Eugen Cicero stands for amazing pianistic virtuosity, phenomenal rhythmic feeling and an inexhaustibly inventive genius.

This concert, recorded concert on Friday, December 13th 1996, was certainly a very special event. First of all, Cicero did not perform with his usual trio, but played instead in a duo with bassist Decebal Badila, a colleague, with whom he had worked since 1994 and who remained a devoted friend until the last.

The recording also demonstrates how Cicero could react with great spontaneity to the moods and the constituency of the audience. A delegation from the Chinese Government was present at the concert and Cicero was aware of this. So when he played his famous "Sunny", he endowed it with typically Chinese intervals. And when listening to "Ah! Vous Dirais Je, Maman", one is immediately reminded that Christmas was close at hand, because the melody of "White Christmas" is introduced into the arrangement.

With the medley of "Misty" and "Tea For Two", Eugen Cicero pays a fond tribute to Erroll Garner, for whose playing he had a very high regard.

On the last track, the traditional folk song "Heidschi Bumbeidschie" which Eugen recorded for his Japanese fans on an earlier CD, *Lullabies*, his total command of harmony and romantic melodic invention is well in evidence.

This is very much an album to treasure, recorded by a uniquely gifted pianist whose premature death, on December 5, 1997 at the age of 57 robbed the music world of a genuine original.

Eugen Cicero · piano
Decebal Badila · bass

recorded live on December 13th, 1996
at the Kursaal in Überlingen, Germany
concert produced by Sam Granz
for Giselle-Productions 2000
album produced by Frank Kleinschmidt
for IN + OUT Records
recorded by Tonteam Wiedemann
mixed by Decebal Badila
digitally mastered by Klangstudio Leyh
album design by Nina Ludwig
drawing by Toma Hirth
liner notes by Thomas Blaser, translated
by Lisa Boulton

1. Christiana's Song
(E. Cicero)
2. Sonate in C-Dur
(D. Scarlatti)
3. Fantasy & Prelude
(F. Chopin)
4. Misty / Tea for two – Medley
(E. Garner / V. Youmans, I. Caesar, O. Harbach)
5. Ah! Vous dirais je, Maman
(W. A. Mozart)
6. Fantasy in D-Moll
(W. A. Mozart)
7. Sunny
(Bobby Hebb)
8. Autumn Leaves
(J. Kosma, J. Prevert, J. Mercer)
9. Badinerie
(J. S. Bach)
10. Rumanian Folksongs
(traditional)
11. Heidschi Bumbeidschi
(traditional)

